

MEDICAL SERVICES, MERREDIN

**232. Mr B.J. GRYLLS to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the minister's statement to the House on 13 June 2002 that -

Seven health authority areas with hub-and-spoke hospitals will be established, which, for the very first time, will result in a single, unified health system in this State that will give the best service possible to the people of Western Australia.

- (1) When did the minister become aware that the Merredin District Hospital did not have a doctor on duty on the weekend of 12 and 13 October?
- (2) Given that the Merredin District Hospital is one of the minister's deemed hubs in the new centralised system, will the minister please explain to the spoke communities where they are to receive their medical attention now that Merredin does not have a permanent doctor?
- (3) Why should the public have confidence in the Government's new centralised bureaucracy when it is clearly failing Merredin and its surrounding communities?
- (4) Given that the current doctor will leave town at the end of this week and no replacement has been organised, will the minister commit to placing a salaried doctor at the Merredin hospital?

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

- (1)-(4) Although I have had no notice of those questions, I will provide an answer. It is because the member for Merredin represents the people of Merredin that I will ask him who is responsible for the provision of general practitioner services in his town. Does the member agree with the local federal member, Wilson Tuckey, who said this morning on the radio that it is the State's responsibility to supply primary health care to country towns?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The level of excitement and noise that just emanated, meant that the minister could not complete his answer to the question.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Later in the radio interview, Wilson Tuckey is quoted as saying that I said it is the federal Government's responsibility to supply primary health care to country towns. That is quite right. What do Mr Tuckey and the member for Merredin say? Mr Tuckey says that is not true in the organisational sense. I ask the member for Merredin to remind Wilson Tuckey - just as federal Labor Party members and I will remind him - that his own web page, which is produced by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing, states that the federal Government has a specific general practice branch to develop the role of general practice and primary health care and to foster education and training etc.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I will put that into context. I am delighted by the member's question because it shows the level of ignorance about the provision of health services in this country of not only our federal counterparts but also the member for Merredin, who is doing a total disservice to his local constituents. I would be more than happy -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members! The level of interjections is extreme. The member for Merredin asked the question. He is about the only member on that side of the House who has not commented on the minister's answer. I am sure that the member for Merredin would like to hear the minister's response.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I would be more than happy to brief the member for Merredin on the true position of health, instead of the issue becoming a cheap political point-scoring exercise. If salaried doctors were employed in that town, 75 per cent of the federal health funding would immediately be removed from the town and from the people of Merredin. It would remove all the funding and the people's ability to access the 30 per cent rebate that everybody else is getting. The member's question is exactly the same question that was raised last week from the other side of the House with regard to mental health care. The allocation from the federal health services for rich Liberal voters who live in Toorak is \$78 a year. However, people who live in, for example, Merredin and the Pilbara - you well know this Mr Speaker - battle to get 32c from the federal Government. The member for Merredin is now recommending that the State Government allow the federal Government to move away from its responsibilities. At the end of the day, we have been working -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, the level of interjections and the length of time occupied by this question have become excessive. I ask the minister to conclude.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The Government is working with the people of Merredin, through the Department of Health, to make sure that these issues are dealt with. The member for Merredin is doing an absolute disservice to his constituents by saying that the federal Government should walk away from its responsibilities. He should talk to Mr Tuckey, the federal member, and do something about it.